

growing confidence

introducing the community gateway model



changing attitudes

Confidence and trust can only be built slowly.

They can't be developed overnight.

On many of England's council housing estates, people may feel that they are not consulted or involved in decisions that affect their neighbourhoods, especially the big decisions about the future of the housing service and other services they receive. This can happen even where a council has encouraged involvement – or asked people to vote on the future of their housing.

The starting point for the Community Gateway Model is that the future of people's homes must be shaped by the people themselves.

Achieving local solutions to local issues requires people to develop the ability and power to identify the concerns they have about their homes and neighbourhoods and act upon them.

By the time tenants vote on stock transfer, it often seems like a "take it or leave it" choice. The Community Gateway Model aims to change this by getting people involved at a much earlier stage, so that they can shape the choices, not just vote on them. Tenants can choose how much power they want and when they want it with built-in capacity to increase their level of involvement when they say so.

Community self-determination will not happen overnight. It will take time, training, flexibility, balance, motivation and safety nets. But, the most important requirement for success will be confidence.



// The more power tenants and communities have to run their own neighbourhoods, the better they are run. //

That's the firm view of Nic Bliss from the Confederation of Co-operative Housing.

Drawing from 20 years experience in the field, Nic believes that only limited levels of participation are available to the vast majority of tenants in mainstream housing.

A major factor is that tenant participation in the work of registered social landlords usually takes place on an association-wide level.

Nic said:

"People are interested in issues that affect them and their local neighbourhood. There is a need for tenants to be able to become engaged at a level they identify with.

"All the research evidence says that when communities take control, they are able to deliver far more efficient neighbourhood services and improvements."

motivation



The Confederation of Co-operative Housing's motivation in developing the Community Gateway Model stems from its desire to develop a wider choice for tenants than the range of options currently offered to them.

At the heart of the argument is the need to build-in flexibility, allowing tenants not only to take power over decision-making to the extent that they want to but also to change that level of power when they want to.

That means tenants and communities would be able to determine their futures at their own pace and would be able to change their minds about how they become engaged.

Tenants would be able to decide how much they want to make use of a range of opportunities including:

- Accessing services provided by the landlord
- Establishing a range of participation levels including local panels or estate agreements

- Setting up a tenant management organisation
- Setting up a housing co-operative
- Working with other organisations on a wider agenda of neighbourhood renewal and regeneration.

In the long term, as more communities decide they want greater control over their neighbourhood, it would mean that scarce resources were spent more wisely according to local priorities.

The Community Gateway Model offers the promise of individuals determining their own future with safeguards ensuring that government requirements are met.

what's in it for tenants?

- Local people identifying local priorities and acting upon them
- Neighbourhood operations that individuals can relate to
- Greater accountability
- Tenants having the level of involvement that they choose
- A vehicle for delivering wider social change
- Services with better focus and better value.

// The report 'Empowering Communities - the Community Gateway Model' recommends ways forward for social landlords, tenants and leaseholders, the government and the Housing Corporation. //

step by step

early progress

The Community Gateway Model has its roots in a concept developed by the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH) and the Co-operative Union (CU).

The proposal was that council housing stock transfer should take place to an enabling body that would allow tenants to pursue a step-by-step approach to controlling their communities.

Together with the Chartered Institute of Housing, CCH and CU commissioned HACAS Chapman Hendy and Trowers & Hamblins to investigate the idea and provide guidance on the legal structures and other arrangements that would be needed to deliver the model.

Tenant representatives and housing practitioners were invited to two seminars run by CCH in London and Manchester to test the concept.

Case study visits were made to two local authorities - Preston Borough Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. In each area, the project team met with council officers and tenant representatives.

The visits sparked proposals that the model should also be tailored to suit arms length management organisations, giving local authorities and tenants a wider range of options.

In addition, the Institute for Public Policy Research tested the community gateway approach through four focus groups of council tenants.

The report "Empowering Communities - the Community Gateway Model" recommends ways forward for social landlords, tenants and leaseholders, the government and the Housing Corporation.



investment in time and training

The critical difference between the Community Gateway process and standard stock transfer or ALMO programmes is its systematic approach to offering opportunities for community empowerment.

Tenants and other key stakeholders including council members and housing department staff need time to develop understanding and ownership of the model.

Time costs money. The Community Gateway Model recognises that additional central government funds will be required to finance community empowerment training and development.

The model has two elements:

- The Community Gateway Process
- The Community Gateway Association

The Community Gateway Process is designed to cement lasting community involvement and ownership by creating more opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to take charge of their own destinies. Any social landlord can adopt it regardless of whether they are pursuing a change of management or ownership.

The first step is to develop a community empowerment strategy spelling out how tenants and leaseholders can increase their involvement in decision-making and management.

The process recognises that people identify most strongly with their own immediate neighbourhoods. That will mean perhaps taking an area currently

covered by a local authority and agreeing within it the location and size of a number of neighbourhoods within which community empowerment will work.

People living in each local neighbourhood will get the chance to consider how they want to be involved.

Every local neighbourhood will be given the widest possible choice of involvement – ranging from straightforward consultation through to direct management - and even ownership - of their housing.

As ability and confidence grows, each local neighbourhood needs to be able to choose to take on more responsibility as it sees fit. Other residents will be consulted about wider issues – for example crime prevention and environmental improvements.

flexibility



key stages - setting up a community gateway association

The Community Gateway Association is a type of not-for-profit organisation that can be used to manage council housing or take ownership of it as a "registered social landlord".

Because each neighbourhood is different, flexibility is the key.

The association could be used for all or part of the housing stock. Its legal structure could be as an "industrial and provident society" or as a non-profit limited company; a stand-alone organisation or part of group structure.

At first, association activities are likely to concentrate on improving housing condition but, having established an effective vehicle for delivering change, it could also grow to have a wider role in neighbourhood regeneration.

Key stages in setting up a Community Gateway Association include:

- Spreading awareness among all stakeholders including tenants and staff
- Identifying local operational areas
- Agreeing the legal structure, size and responsibility of the association
- Investigating the potential for wider regeneration
- Starting work with tenants and leaseholders to promote the model and recruit members.
- Setting up shadow boards of the new organisation
- Negotiating with key stakeholders including the government, funders and the Housing Corporation
- Developing a community empowerment strategy and local business plan.
- If stock transfer is on the cards, including community empowerment programmes in the offer to tenants and leaseholders.

Each element of the Community Gateway Model places individual empowerment at the heart of the business of delivering better quality services with better value for money. It's about building communities where people want to live - not only today but also tomorrow.



the preston experience

Preston Borough Council is one of the first local authorities in the country to actively investigate the Community Gateway Model.

Striving to meet the government's decent homes' targets, the authority recognised that it could not retain ownership of its 7,000 plus properties and generate the kind of investment required to bring them up to scratch.

But, wholesale stock transfer was not acceptable locally without a method of balancing the break from local authority control with continuity of civic commitment to social change.

“ One of our aims is to grow our own people from within the community. ”

a question of balance



The city council decided that the level of neighbourhood participation offered by the community gateway process would bring that balance. It is now aiming for a tenant ballot for transfer under the Community Gateway Model in 2004.

In early 2003, Peter Deacon will give up his job as Preston's Director of Housing to take up a two-year contract as Community Gateway Manager.

Peter, a member of the national Community Gateway Model steering group, said:

“Like many local authorities, unless we get external funding we have no chance of hitting the decent homes targets because of the condition of our housing stock.

“The Community Gateway Model should produce the same level of incoming investment as any other kind of stock transfer.

“There are some extra costs and extra work in developing community empowerment and we are bidding for extra support from government.

“As yet, we have received no guarantees but we are committed to pursuing the Community Gateway Model because we think this will work for tenants and for the council.”

Peter said that preliminary work due to start in 2003 would include detailed research into community aspirations as well as the foundation of a training programme that would give new opportunities to local people.

He explained:

“One of our aims is to grow our own people from within the community.

“We envisage that local people may enter the training programme as volunteers but that once the Community Gateway Model is established they will move forward to perhaps take up paid roles in the development and encouragement of tenant empowerment locally.”

Into the future, Peter believes it is inevitable that the new mechanism of delivering neighbourhood services in Preston will expand its brief beyond housing improvement and management to tackle a wider range of social issues. Neighbourhood organisations would be powerful tools aiding council members to put their commitment to social change into tangible results.

He said:

“Once the new investment for housing starts coming into the area, there will be a vehicle in place to deliver wider regeneration in a way that is locally controlled and locally accountable.”



the challenge

The Community Gateway Model will bring lasting improvements to disadvantaged neighbourhoods through a fundamental change in the way that their housing and other services are run.

Building from the bottom up is a tried and tested method of creating structures that are going to last.

The transformation of the Community Gateway Model from commendable idea to practical working demands positive participation at every level of the social housing chain, from tenants through landlords to the government and the Housing Corporation.

Capacity building won't produce results if it is restricted to community activity. Housing providers need to investigate what internal action they must take if they are to embrace change.

One vital issue that must be addressed early on is the identification of a pool of expertise to deliver community empowerment programmes on the street. Skilled people will be needed to produce good results.

They won't be easy to find but the potential rewards for their work include the satisfaction of improving the everyday lives of the neighbourhoods and people they serve.

Investment in time and training to deliver community empowerment should be met through extra funding from the government and the Housing Corporation.

How does it fit with government priorities?

The Community Gateway Model fits in well with the government's wider strategies on neighbourhood renewal, as well as helping to deliver decent homes.

Caroline Keightley, from the Community Housing Task Force at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, has kept a watching brief over the model's development through its steering group.

Caroline said:

"The messages coming out of the current government review of how to achieve the decent homes target include the importance and value of community involvement in delivering change.

"The potential for moving from tenant participation towards tenant empowerment is now widely recognised."

next steps



what the report proposes:

The full report has a range of recommendations to councils, the government and the Housing Corporation. They include:

- Social landlords, tenants and leaseholders should investigate the model when they review strategic options for the future of the housing service
- Where the model is favoured, local authorities need to re-shape their organisation to deliver community empowerment
- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister could select two or three local authorities including at least one proposed stock transfer to act as pilot projects for the model

- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Housing Corporation should work to ensure that funding mechanisms are in place to finance devolution of power to tenants and local communities
- The Housing Corporation should recognise and adopt the Community Gateway Association as one of the constitutional forms available in stock transfer.

The government is already considering the model in reviewing the way forward for social housing. What is now needed is for more places - like Preston - to consider the new approach in detail and for tenants and landlords to work together to turn it from a new idea to a practical reality.

how do we get further details?

This leaflet is only an outline of the model. The full report by HACAS Chapman Hendy and Trowers & Hamblins describes the new approach and how it could work in detail.

It covers:

- How to get started
- A model legal structure
- Business planning and financial issues
- How the community empowerment strategy could work
- The key messages about the new approach.

Copies of the report "Empowering Communities - the Community Gateway Model" are available from the Chartered Institute of Housing, price £15.00 (plus £1.50 postage and packing).

Email: pubs@cih.org or telephone: 024 7685 1752. For extra copies of this leaflet contact the same number.



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Housing and community photography kindly supplied by LHA (Leicester Housing Association) and Keynote group.

Written, designed and produced by The Bridge Group. Tel: 024 7630 6666. (January 2003)